



This Place Matters: Exploring Rural Planning through Funding a Rail-Trail in Harris County, Georgia

Austin Shelton

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Bill Drummond, Advisor

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KEY TERMS

ACS American Community Survey

ARC Atlanta Regional Commission

CDBG Community Development Block Grant

CBD Central Business District

CCLR Center for Creative Land Recycling

CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CPG Community Prevention Grants Program

CSA Combined Statistical Area

CSRA Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission

DOT Department of Transportation

EDA Economic Development Administration

FAST Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act

FHWA Federal Highway Administration

GDOT Georgia Department of Transportation

HUD U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

LWCF Land and Water Conservation Fund Stateside Program

MAP-21 Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act

MID Municipal Improvement District

MPO Metropolitan Planning Organization

MSA Metropolitan Statistical Area

NPS National Park Service

RTC Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

RTCA Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

RTP Recreational Trails Program

RVRC River Valley Regional Commission

SAFETEA-LU Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users

TAD Tax Allocation District (Georgia)

TDR Transfer of Development Rights

TIF Tax Increment Financing (outside Georgia)

TIFIA Transportation Infrastructure Financing and Investment Act

TIGER Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery Program

US United States

INTRODUCTION

Activating abandoned rail corridors by converting them into trails and other kinds of public space is not a new idea by any means. Congress passed the National Trail Systems Act in 1983, making it much easier for local governments to convert abandoned or underused rail lines into recreational trails, though there are many examples of trails that predate it.¹

In Georgia, many counties and municipalities are seeking to transform unused infrastructure into a public good and create trail networks of their own. The BeltLine garners most of the national attention, but other trails in Columbus, Lookout Mountain and along the coastline of Georgia are nevertheless exciting additions to their respective communities. As the popularity of trails has grown in recent decades, trail proponents have conceived an array of methods to finance projects, drawing from sources in all sectors and all levels of governments.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First it is meant to be an aid for the possible creation of a rail-trail in Harris County, a largely rural county in middle-west Georgia. The rail corridor in question, over twenty miles long, has been abandoned for nearly a decade. Its location is ideal for a variety of tourism and recreation related activities, as well as potential economic development.

Second, it will hopefully be something of a manual for rural and small-town trail development, and provide an easy reference for rural county governments and small municipalities who are seeking to rejuvenate their communities by reshaping unused infrastructure into a public good. To do so, it will lay

¹ Margello, *The Costs of Rail-to- Trail Conversions*, 2014.

out the tools and processes of trail development through the story of the trail through Harris County, and its implications for the county and residents.

The history and literature surrounding rail-trails will be explored, including examples of challenges faced by other developments, followed by a brief exploration of the geographic and historical context of the rail conduit in question. Trails in communities with similar features to Harris County will also be briefly covered. An exhaustive list will then be presented of potential sources of funding, categorized by type, and will form the bulk of this paper. Finally, arguments and research regarding rural economic development and the impact of rail-trails on rural communities will be examined, exploring both positive outcomes and the unique challenges faced by this particular type of development.

RAIL-TRAILS

Rail-trails (also called rails-to-trails, rail trails, and rails-with-trails if alongside an active railroad line) are currently a hot topic among many planning practitioners. Recent high profile rail-trail developments include the High Line in New York City and the BeltLine in Atlanta, but hundreds of communities of all sizes have or are planning their own future conversions. There are even a growing number of regional trails spanning great distances and connecting multiple communities, such as the Silver Comet Trail in Georgia, the Katy Trail in Missouri and the John Wayne Pioneer Trail in Washington state.

The reasons for creating a rail-trail are as diverse as the trails themselves. Trails serve as recreation, and can be a part of a larger public health plan meant to encourage more active lifestyles. They can connect neighborhoods to each other and to job centers, and provide safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists to move about without having to share space with cars. They can also serve as conduits for public transit, reshaping the fabric of the built environment around them.

Regardless of the reasoning behind them, trails serve as valuable assets for their respective communities, providing an abundance of qualitative and quantitative benefits. A feature that unites them all is the ability to take advantage of America's aging and often underutilized rail networks. America was once a leader in the development and spread of railroads across the vast expanses of the nation. Looking at the form of many small and medium-sized cities across the US will reveal that they often owe their existence to the railroad in some form or another.

Though railroads are still a big part of the national infrastructure, particularly as it comes to moving goods and materials cross-country, the 20th century was not kind to the industry. The rise of the automobile, the interstate highway system and the growth of airline travel led to a sharp decrease in passenger rail service, dealing major blows to former hubs like Chattanooga. The subsequent embrace of trucking goods as a more reliable and flexible source of transport struck a blow at the demand for engines and railyards across the nation. Regional rail companies were driven out of business or absorbed into the few remaining industry giants like CSX or Norfolk Southern.

What this decline means for many communities is that there is a plethora of abandoned rail infrastructure crisscrossing the nation, indiscriminately cutting through neighborhoods, downtowns, undeveloped land and scenic vistas alike. Though it is easy to see it as little more than wasted space or an eyesore, the comprehensive coverage of the railroad provides an unparalleled opportunity to connect communities both within and to each other.

RAIL-TRAILS IN LITERATURE

There is a diverse body of literature surrounding rail-trails, and provides many examples of rail-trail developments around the country, and the myriad reasons behind why these projects were pursued. Some communities wished to add more greenspace to the repertoire of their community; others wanted infrastructure to promote more active lifestyles, or encourage alternative modes of

transportation. Still others approached rail-trails from an economic development standpoint, arguing that a public investment in infrastructure would catalyze private investment nearby.

Public Health & Active Lifestyles

The Wyoming Valley is a region in northeastern Pennsylvania, centered on the Scranton–Wilkes-Barre–Hazleton metropolitan statistical area (MSA). In the early 2000s, several communities expressed interest in creating a trail network in the region. The Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership was created to spearhead these efforts. A 2009 article in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* details the arguments and results of this effort. The partnership received a grant from Active Living by Design, a Chapel Hill based nonprofit that seeks to promote healthier lifestyle choices in communities.

The crux of the author's argument is that trail development, land conservation and active living are natural allies, and proponents of each can be found in every kind of built environment. This meant that each of the Wyoming Valley communities was able to preserve the lifestyle that most appealed to it, but that the common goal while conceptualizing the trail network was the support of connectivity and more active lifestyles.² What was important was that the network connect a variety of environments, since trails with actual destinations more efficiently support active lifestyles. Though walkable urban areas often support activity without the use of dedicated trails, these habits can be difficult to encourage in suburban and rural areas that are more dependent on automobiles for transportation. Trails are an easy way to make up for this by creating alternative transportation options that are also scenic, as well as promoting the use and enjoyment of existing greenspace that might otherwise be unconnected, like parks, forests and backyards.

² Schasberger, "Promoting and Developing a Trail Network," 2009.

Connectivity & Transportation

In Georgia, by far the most publicized rail-trail project is the Atlanta BeltLine, a 22-mile loop trail circling the urban core of Atlanta. First conceived by a Georgia Tech planning and architecture student, the project is currently reshaping parts of the city in a way that has not been seen since the inception of the Interstate Highway System. For better or worse, entire neighborhoods are being transformed as a direct result of renewed interest and investment brought about by the development of this trail.

The BeltLine is a great example of creating a rail-trail with mobility and connectivity as one of the primary goals. The original plan for the BeltLine heavily emphasizes the dozens of neighborhoods the rail lines pass through, and how such a trail would provide a direct link between many parts of Atlanta that are divided by highways, active rail yards and gaps in transit service. Though it has yet to be implemented, the plan also calls for light-rail service around the loop, in order to create a viable mass transit option supplemental to the existing MARTA bus and rail network and fill gaps in the current system.

Legal Complications

However, redevelopments of this magnitude are often burdened with their own sets of legal challenges and complications, particularly with land acquisition and the often-complex funding schemes necessary to create them. Again, the BeltLine is a great example, with its lengthy and very public feud with the Atlanta Public School system over funding caused by unforeseen issues with the Tax Allocation District (TAD) due to the housing crisis and Great Recession.³

More commonly, rail-trails face legal issues surrounding takings claims from adjacent property owners. A 2015 article in the *University of Memphis Law Review* investigates takings claims leveled against the

³ Leslie, "Beltline CEO: Dispute with APS causing harm to Beltline," 2015.

Spanish Moss Trail, an ongoing rail-trail development in Beaufort County, South Carolina. The author, Nick Margello, posits that the federal government has not taken adequate stock of just how valuable trail conversions will be, and will inadvertently attempt to shortchange adjacent property owners by not paying them what they feel is just compensation for their property. Conversely, local governments will drop large sums of money fighting takings claims from property owners, and perhaps spend even more than they would have in the first place had the impact of the trail been assessed more generously and the owners properly compensated.⁴

TRAILS IN GEORGIA

Per the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit dedicated to creating these trails, Georgia has 26 active rails-to-trails totaling 186 miles in length. There are currently 8 projects in some stage of development, potentially adding another 156 miles of trail to the state. Mapping the active trails reveals that the majority are in the Atlanta metropolitan area, with the coastline of Georgia and its islands being the second most popular region. Beyond that, there are a few scattered around the remainder of the state, including near Albany, Rome and Douglas. There are also a few in the mountains of North Georgia, specifically near Rome and Tallulah Falls, on the border with South Carolina.⁵

Most of these trails do not form a larger network, and there is little connectivity between them. They also seem to be predominantly for recreation. The Fall Line Trace in Columbus and GreenBelt in Carrollton both have the potential to be used as transit corridors, given their connection of residential areas to other economically important areas in their respective cities like universities and central business districts (CBDs).

⁴ Margello, 479.

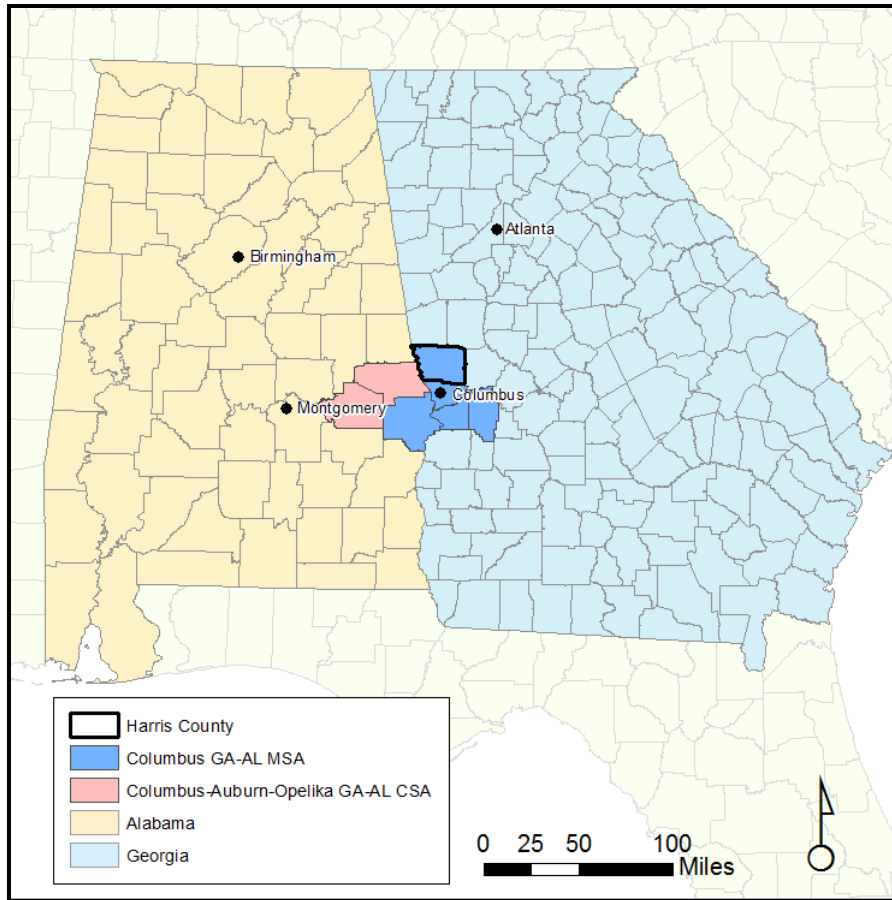
⁵ "Georgia," Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, <https://www.railstotrails.org/our-work/united-states/georgia/#state>.

HARRIS COUNTY

Harris County is located in west-central Georgia, just north of Columbus. It is bordered on the south by Muscogee County, to the north by Troup and Meriwether counties, and Talbot to the east. Lee and Chambers counties in Alabama form the western border.

The county is part of the Columbus Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes three other Georgia counties as well as Russell County in Alabama. The 2015 estimated population was 313,749, meaning that Harris County makes up approximately 11% of the population of the MSA. The population is expected to keep growing in the coming decades, though at a slower pace than other parts of the metro area, like Columbus and Russell County.⁶

⁶ Demographic and Income Comparison Profile: Harris County, Georgia. (2016). ESRI



Location of Harris County and Columbus, GA MSA.

Harris County was created by an act of the Georgia Legislature in 1827. The former Native American residents, part of the Creek Indian Nation (also known as the Muscogee), had been removed as a condition of the 1825 Treaty of Indian Springs. White settlers arrived soon after, taking advantage of Georgia's land lottery. The newly formed county was named for Charles Harris, a prominent attorney and former mayor of Savannah, who had died earlier in 1827.⁷

The US Census Bureau estimates that the population of the county in 2015 was 33,381, a 4% increase from the 2010 Census population of 32,024. There are five incorporated areas in Harris County, the

⁷ Senterfitt, Donald. *Charles Harris*. Date Unknown.

largest of which is Pine Mountain, with a population of roughly 1,300. The county seat is the city of Hamilton, near the geographic center of the county.

In 2013 the estimated median household income in 2013 was \$58,677, while the average income was \$74,184. This is slightly higher than the national average, and very high for the region, and is the highest average income in Georgia outside the Atlanta metro. They are all projected to increase in 2018 to \$75,713 and \$85,626.

	1990	2000	2010	2015 (ACS)	2020	2030	2040
Harris County	17,788	23,695	32,024	33,381	38,738	45,856	52,974
Muscogee County	179,278	186,291	189,885	200,579	195,758	201,062	206,365
Columbus MSA	266,452	281,768	294,865	313,749	309,441	323,648	337,854
Georgia	6,478,216	8,186,453	10,214,860	9,687,653	11,819,579	13,090,692	14,361,805

Figure 1: Population Projections for Harris County, Columbus MSA and Georgia⁸

At close to 80% of the population, the demographic makeup of the county is overwhelmingly white. The largest minority population is African-American, at 17%, with all other races making up the remaining percentages. This is expected to remain roughly constant in 2018, with a slight decrease (<5%) of the white population and subsequent increase in minority populations. The average age of the county is high, with about 65% of the population being 35 or older in the 2010 census, but this is trending slightly downward according to more recent estimates.⁹

HARRIS COUNTY RAIL CORRIDOR

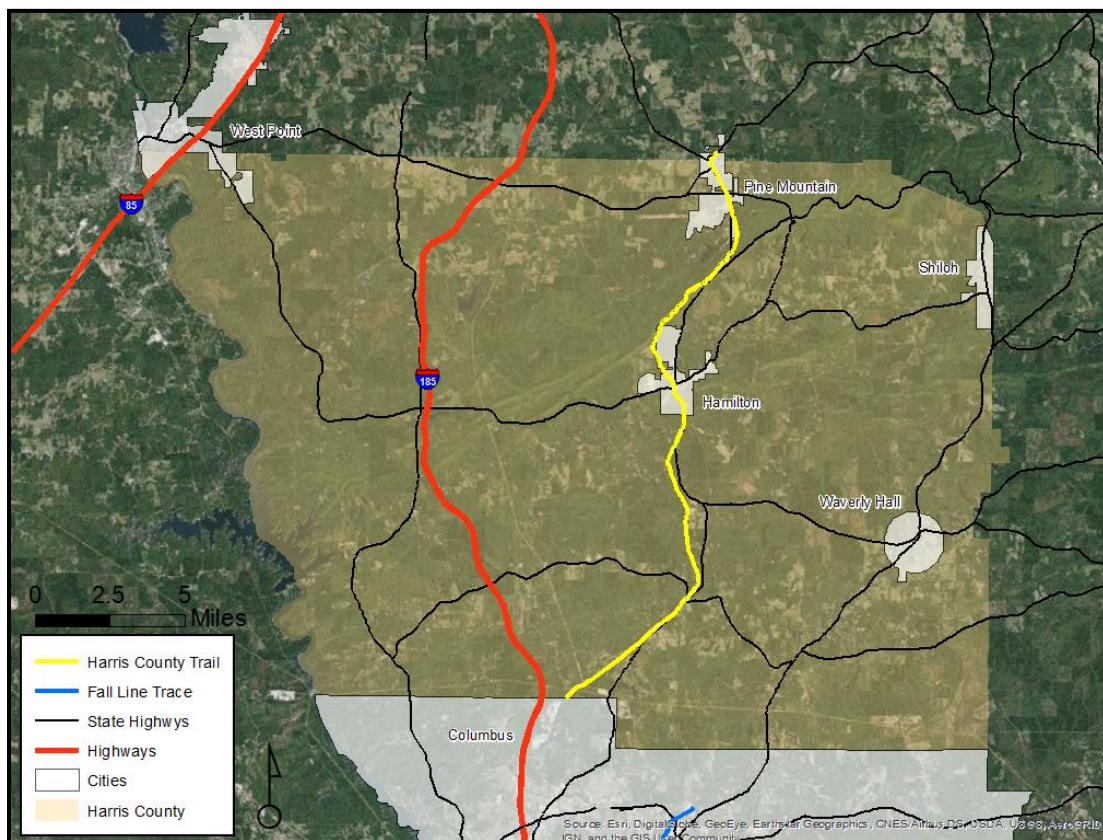
The rail corridor in question runs north to south along the center of Harris County, a length of approximately 21.5 miles. It connects the central railyard in downtown Columbus, Georgia to east-west

⁸ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), author's calculations.

⁹ Ibid.

lines further north, and eventually Atlanta. It roughly follows the route of US-27, passing through Pine Mountain, Hamilton and by the former depot building in Cataula.

The line was originally constructed sometime around 1890 by the North and South Railroad of Georgia, a company created to build a connection between Columbus and Rome. The Central of Georgia Railroad, a company based in Savannah, acquired the company soon after and continued construction. Though other lines from Columbus already existed, the company wished to create a more direct route between Columbus and Atlanta for their engines, in addition to the aforementioned route to Rome. It would continue to be operated by Central of Georgia Railroad until the 1980s, when it was acquired by the Georgia Southwestern Railroad.¹⁰



Location of the potential trail in Harris County, in yellow.

¹⁰ Storey, "Cataula Depot", 2017.

Though smaller portions had fallen out of use in the 1990s, the rest of the line was abandoned in 2008. It would not sit empty for long. The land was acquired by Harris County with the help of funding provided by Callaway Gardens. The rails and ties were soon torn up, and the ballast (foundation) of the old railroad has sat empty since.

Harris County is in what is known as the “Fall Line,” a geological feature that serves as the dividing line between the hills and mountains of northern Georgia and the coastal plain in the south. This is the reason Columbus exists, and where the Fall Line Trace gets its name. What this means is that from north to south, the elevation and hilliness of the terrain decreases rapidly. Trail users would experience a variety of scenery, from the side of a ridgeline in the north to relatively flat woodlands in the south. Most of the land outside Hamilton and Pine Mountain is heavily wooded, whether it be wilderness or timberland.

EXAMPLE TRAILS

The following is a list of trails that are similar in some way to the trail being proposed in Harris County. Some are located nearby, and could in the future serve as pieces of a larger regional network of trails. Some are in communities with population density and aesthetics comparable to Harris County. The impact these trails are having could serve as a window into what the county can expect in the future. They can also serve as good cost estimates, or perhaps provide warnings on how to avoid unnecessary complications.

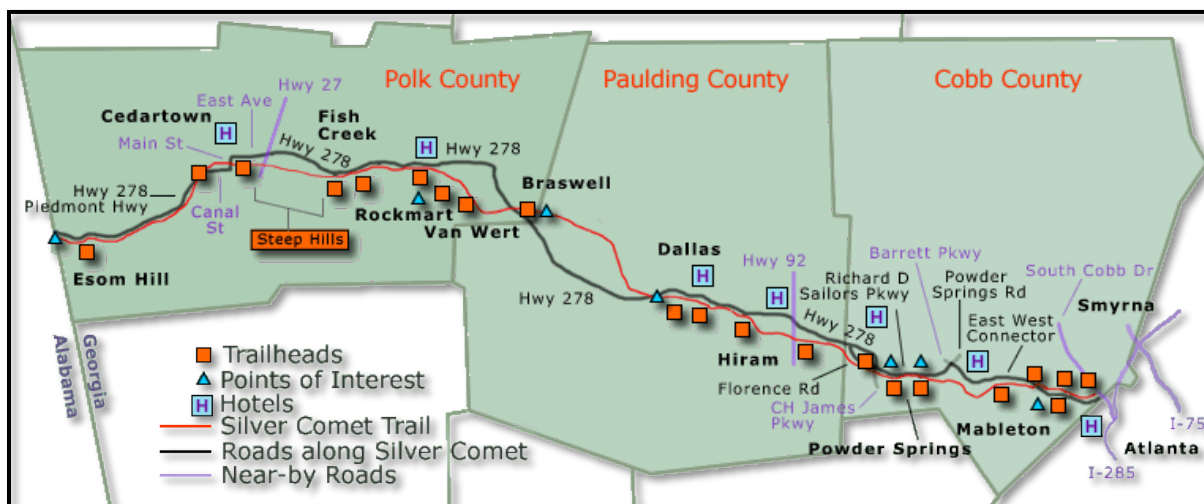
The Silver Comet

The Silver Comet Trail runs from Smyrna in Cobb County to the Alabama state line, a total distance of 61.5 miles. From there it becomes the Chief Ladiga trail, continuing an additional 32.5 miles before terminating in the city of Anniston. In Polk County, it runs east-west along the central axis of the county.

The original rail line, the Silver Comet Passenger Line, was completed in 1903 and saw passenger service from 1947 to 1969. The line was abandoned in 1989, and purchased by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) in 1992 with the intent to develop it into a trail. Construction began in 1998, and completed in August 2008. The 94-mile long trail is the second longest rail-trail conversion in the United States. A report by ALTA Planning discusses several potential expansions of the trail to nearby cities like Aragon and Mableton and regional destinations like Rome, with an estimated total cost of \$59 million.¹¹

Though the trail covers three counties and over sixty miles, the portion most like the proposed Harris County trail runs through Polk County, given the similar population and largely rural aesthetic.

Polk County is located along the border of Georgia and Alabama, due west of Cobb County and northwest of Atlanta. The population as of the 2010 Census was 41,475, and was expected to increase slightly to 41,524 by 2015. The two major cities are Cedartown and Rockmart, with a 2015 estimated population of 9,872 and 4,300, respectively. In 2010 the population was 73.5% white, 12.5% black, 11.8% Hispanic, and all other races making up the remainder. The 2015 ACS estimates project that the share of the population that is white has decreased to 71%.



Source: silvercometga.com

¹¹ Kenemer, *Silver Comet Trail Economic Impact Analysis - Executive Summary*, 2012.

Fall Line Trace

The Fall Line Trace is a rail-trail in Columbus, Georgia, due south of Harris County. Completed in 2012, it was constructed on land purchased from Norfolk Southern by the Columbus Consolidated Government. It begins at the 14th Street Pedestrian Bridge in downtown Columbus and ends at Psalmond Road near the western portion of the city, a distance of over 11 miles. It is a 12-foot wide asphalt trail, and includes two park-and-ride areas for visitors. The trail runs through nearly a dozen neighborhoods, and intersects with the METRA bus transit system at numerous points throughout the city. A report by the Montgomery Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMPO) cites the total development cost of the Fall Line Trace at \$14,935,000, or roughly \$250 per linear foot.¹²

The 14th Street Pedestrian Bridge also connects to the Columbus Riverwalk, which began in the late 1980s and now stretches nearly 12 miles along the eastern banks of the Chattahoochee. The Fall Line Trace is one of many projects Columbus has taken on in recent decades as a way of improving the urban core; the one that has received the most publicity is the urban whitewater course now running through downtown. The Fall Line Trace is significant in that it is one of the largest projects to take place outside downtown, and perhaps the largest alternative transportation project the city has undertaken since the creation of the METRA bus system in the 1970s.¹³

The Carrollton GreenBelt

The GreenBelt is a trail currently under construction in nearby Carrollton, Georgia. Once completed, it will form an 18-mile ring around most of the city of Carrollton. It is not a rail-trail, but the city had many of the same goals in mind during its conception. The completed trail will provide a strip of greenspace around the entire city, as well as connecting existing parks and other natural features like Lake Carroll.

¹² Montgomery Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMPO), *Appendix F: Cost Analysis*, 2012.

¹³ <http://www.columbusga.org/metra/history.htm>

Multiple neighborhoods within the city will have more direct access to one another, as well as the main campus of the University of West Georgia.

Spanish Moss Trail

The Spanish Moss Trail is a 14-mile greenway currently under construction in Beaufort County, South Carolina, located about halfway between Charleston and Savannah. Once completed, it will connect the cities of Beaufort and Port Royal, along the route of the historic Magnolia Line Railroad. The Spanish Moss Trail is noted for its scenery, passing through urban areas, marshland and coastal waters, allowing trail users the unique chance for coastal wildlife viewing and visitation of historic spots in some of the older neighborhoods of both Beaufort and Port Royal.



Wetlands along the Spanish Moss Trail. Source: spanishmosstrail.com

Atlanta BeltLine

Any conversation about rail-trails in Georgia would be remiss without discussing the Atlanta BeltLine.

First conceived in a thesis written by Georgia Tech city planning and architecture student Ryan Gravel,

his 1999 proposal all began with the observation of the nearly complete ring of rail lines around the urban core of Atlanta, a testament to the city's past as a national railroad hub.

The BeltLine (or Belt Line as it was called in his thesis) is the largest infrastructure project of its kind currently under construction in the US. The 22-mile loop will connect 45 neighborhoods in the city, and has so far generated billions of dollars in investment on nearby land. The project is and has been beset by problems related to funding, legal disputes, construction delays, and belittling comments by the New York Times.¹⁴ Regardless, it stands as a paragon for just how much life and energy a well planned and well timed project can bring to a city.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the BeltLine is more than what many communities need or can afford. It is wider and made of concrete, because the amount of foot and bike traffic it receives is far greater than what a rural or mid-sized city can expect. In addition, Gravel had always conceived of the BeltLine as having a transit component, preferably light rail.¹⁵ Though when and if it should be implemented is a hot topic of debate amongst Atlanta planners, transit takes this rail-trail far and above what is necessary or feasible for many rural communities, and forms no small chunk of its total \$4.8 billion development cost.

COSTS

Initial Costs

Land acquisition create hefty expenses right out of the gate for local governments seeking to develop rail-trails, and any ensuing legal troubles can further delay and frustrate efforts to begin construction.

¹⁴ Fausset, "A Glorified Sidewalk, and the Path to Transform Atlanta," 2016.

¹⁵ Gravel, "Belt Line Atlanta", 35.

Fortunately, that hurdle has already been cleared, as the entire length of the railroad within county lines is owned by the county thanks to a generous donation.

A 2014 engineering report by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) estimated the total cost of a section of the proposed trail. The section in question runs from the town center of Pine Mountain, past the US-27 entrance of Callaway Gardens (called the Beach Entrance by locals) to the Central Purchasing Office, also on US-27. This segment is approximately 1.92 miles long, out of a total 21.5 miles, and the report assumes a 10-foot-wide asphalt trail with 2 foot shoulders. The total construction cost for this section is estimated at \$640,130.05, or roughly \$63.15 per linear foot.¹⁶ Of this, \$512,473 would ideally come from either a grant or another state or federal source, with the remainder matched by the county. If we assume this price per linear foot remains constant, the entire trail would cost approximately \$7,168,788.

Later Sections

Given the existing report by GDOT, the relatively short section, and existing activity around the potential trail bed, the most likely candidate for the first section would be the nearly 2 miles from Pine Mountain to the Gardens. From there, the trail could be completed piecemeal as funding becomes available, with natural or community features serving as endpoints. From Callaway, perhaps the next logical trailhead would be the Old County Store and observation point along US-27, near the top of the ridgeline for Pine Mountain (the geological feature, not the town). This spot would also create convenient access to the Pine Mountain Trail, which begins across the street at the intersection of US-27 and County Road 190.

From there it is roughly 4.5 miles to Hamilton, another 3.5 to Mulberry Creek, and 4 to the Cataula Depot. Hamilton aside, these sections are most valuable for the scenery, being largely forested hills,

¹⁶ GDOT, TE Project Concept Report, 2014.

creeks and meadows. Outside of Hamilton, few people live near these sections, though there are a few spots that cross roadways. The cost per mile from the GDOT report would most likely provide an accurate estimate of the total cost, since by this point the terrain will have leveled off.

Troublesome Spots

There are a few potentially troublesome spots along the route, mostly in the northern part of the county. The railroad passes over US-27 just south of Callaway Gardens, and while the bridge is structurally sound, it will need to be fully evaluated before use. Though some amount of lead contamination is possible, it is unlikely it would be a serious hazard for users.



The bridge over US-27, near Callaway Gardens. Source: maps.google.com

Another potential hazardous spot is along the ridgeline near F.D. Roosevelt State Park. The trail would run along an incline, and guard rails would likely have to be installed for several miles to account for the steep grade and prevent any accidents. Installation would have to be considered, as any rails would likely have to be bored into the bedrock; a cost that is not taken into account in the GDOT report.

Similarly, any access points would likely involve building or digging out ramps up the incline, incurring further costs.

Additionally, areas where the right-of-way crosses roads and private property are all potentially troublesome spots once the trail is completed. Though most of the intersections are open enough to provide easy viewing of both trail users and automobiles, there are several places with either blind driveways or county roads with sudden bends. These will need to be addressed on an individual basis, either by clearing vegetation to provide easier viewing, caution lights activated by the trail users, or something more elaborate. The presence of the trail could also serve as a traffic calming measure in more residential areas, which could prove an additional benefit to nearby residents.

Finally, the bridge over Mulberry Creek will likely require extensive renovation in order to be safe and passable for trail users. Though the larger structure is most likely still sound, the top of the bridge will need to be completely redone before it can be paved. Guardrails will also need to be added both to the bridge and areas immediately adjacent, given the height of the bridge over the creek.



The bridge over Mulberry Creek. Source: Author's Photos

FUNDING SOURCES

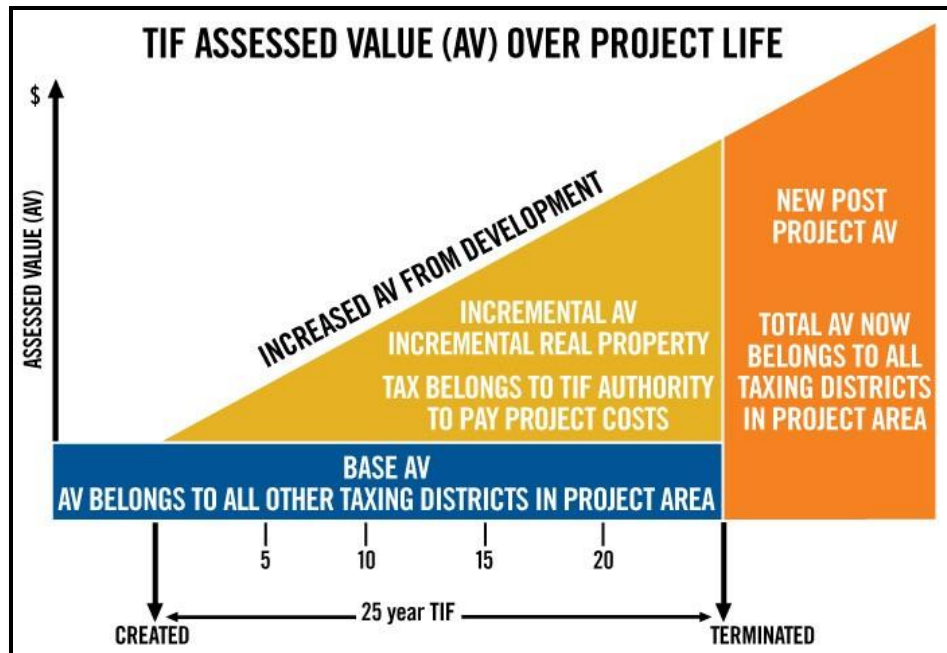
Envisioning and designing new ideas for communities is exciting work, but financing new public infrastructure is always tricky regardless of location. It can be even more difficult in areas without large tax bases, which can limit opportunity for more traditional funding. Rural communities like Harris County may find it difficult to compete against larger, well-funded municipalities for the same state or federal funding streams.

Thus, more creative financing schemes are often needed, either compiled from a variety of sources or through unconventional means. Fortunately, there are a plethora of options available specifically catering towards the creation of trails and rail-trails. The following list covers a variety of potential sources of capital, grouped together by the kind of award (grant, loan, etc.).

PUBLIC FINANCE

Tax Allocation District (TAD)

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a widely used economic development tool whereby a municipality or other local government seek to take advantage of expanding the tax base in a specific geographic area. The principle is simple: special districts are created around areas or projects in need of redevelopment or reinvestment. Within these districts, any increase in property taxes are earmarked and directed towards specific improvements. The amount of tax dollars allocated towards public institutions is frozen for the duration of the TAD, often a decade or more. Upon their termination, the full increase is redistributed proportionally. In most of the US they are commonly called TIFs, but in Georgia these schemes are known as Tax Allocation Districts, or TADs. A chart detailing the TIF scheme is below.



Source: Fort Collins Renewal Authority, renewfortcollins.com

TIFs were created to bring attention to underutilized or distressed areas, but the TIF model is flexible. They are often able to generate investment where more traditional strategies may not, especially in areas with limited tax bases. TIFs are also more likely to attract investment because they are not backed by local government, and therefore do not affect a city's bond rating.¹⁷ Though it is usually wise to consult the community before such a big investment, TIFs do not require a public vote and can be decided by local council members.

Georgia law places a few restrictions on the creation of TADs. For example, a TAD cannot be created if existing TADs plus the new TAD "is greater than 10 percent of the tax digest (total value of taxable property) for the City."¹⁸ Though this hypothetical Harris County TAD would be the first, it could not exceed ten percent of the total tax digest of the county. While this could limit the potential gains of a

¹⁷ Metal, *The Lowcountry Lowline*, 2016.

¹⁸ Invest Atlanta, "Tax Allocation District FAQs".

TAD given the generally stagnant tax digest of the county, it could be workable if property values in Hamilton, Pine Mountain and Cataula are going up.¹⁹

TSPLOST

In 2012, a statewide referendum was held to approve or deny an extra sales tax dedicated to funding transportation projects in Georgia. Though the entire state voted at the same time, there were technically twelve separate referendums, one for each regional commission in the state of Georgia. The Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, or TSPLOST, was largely a failure, being defeated handily in most regional commissions. However, the River Valley Regional Commission (RVRC) was one of three referendums that passed, along with the Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission (CSRA) and the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission.

As the name suggests, the referendum approves the creation of an additional penny sales tax, on top of the sales tax already in place. It applies to all goods sold within the regional commission's territory, and is to be administered as grants by the RVRC. The additional tax is set to last for ten years, beginning in 2012.

A list produced by the RVRC lists many of the projects that TSPLOST money is intended to fund. See Appendix 1 for a map of the project types and locations. What immediately becomes apparent after reading this list is the supremacy of road construction and road improvements. Though there are a few bridges and other infrastructure improvements slated, the clear majority are road or intersection improvements, especially rural highways.

Though high capacity transit is unlikely outside of Columbus given low population densities, trails are a good way to introduce non-automobile infrastructure that also fits in with the rural character of much of

¹⁹ Invest Atlanta, "Tax Allocation District FAQs".

the region. This dearth of alternative transportation infrastructure projects could just as easily speak to the lack of demand as the potential need in these communities. The argument for using TSPLOST money for trails is there, if funding has not already been allocated.

GRANTS

Transportation Alternatives

Somewhat ironic given its name, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is one of the largest and most reliable sources of federal funding for trails. Prior to 1991, bicycle and pedestrian programs were not eligible for federal funding outside of amendments to existing legislation that allowed funds for these programs to be tacked onto highway construction. The most recent legislation dealing with trail development was the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, or FAST (H.R.22), which was passed in 2015. It was preceded by The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) (P.L. 112-141) which was passed in 2012 and expired in 2014.

The FAST Act provides five years of funding, as opposed to shorter terms for previous legislation which required frequent extensions by Congress. Over this five-year period, until the end of fiscal year (FY) 2020, a total of \$280 billion will be made available for various projects around the country.

Both MAP-21 and FAST included the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program, which provides rules and funding specifically for bicycle and pedestrian projects, and combined the funding pool of the two. The resulting list of qualified projects was extensive, and included everything from historic preservation to safe pedestrian routes to schools.²⁰

²⁰ Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, "TA Basics".

The upside of TA funding is the flexibility it provides to state and local governments in what kinds of projects are funded and how much they receive. For example, up to half of the TA funding received by a large metropolitan area can be redistributed to other places, potentially making this funding available in regions that would not likely receive it otherwise. Under MAP-21, a nonprofit must partner with state or local government in order to receive TA funding. The FAST Act expands these parameters, allowing “nonprofit organizations, local governments, regional transportation authorities, transit agencies, natural resource or public lands agencies, school districts, tribal governments, or any local or regional governmental entity with responsibility for oversight of transportation or recreational trails (other than a metropolitan planning organization or a State agency that the State determines to be eligible) to apply for funds.”²¹

In 2016, the TA Program was superseded by the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG), also from the FHWA. Of the \$280 billion available over the life of the FAST Act, the amount allocated towards TA projects is \$835 million for the first two years (2016-17), and \$850 million until 2020.

Transportation Infrastructure Financing and Investment Act

The FAST Act also created the Transportation Infrastructure Financing and Investment Act (TIFIA), a source of low interest loans for financing transportation projects. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy hopes that TIFIA will be useful for the development of trail networks, and suggests reforms in order to make it even more so. These reforms include:

1. Lowering the minimum project size from \$50 million to \$10 million for projects that involve smaller local governments.
2. Allowing segments of different projects to be bundled together in order to meet the threshold;

²¹ Metal, *The Lowcountry Lowline*, 2016.

3. Allowing State Infrastructure Banks (SIBs) to use TIFIA in order to help finance rural projects;²²
4. Lowering transaction costs and streamlining the application process;
5. Providing application fee waivers for projects whose total costs are less than \$75 million.

The first four of these reforms were secured with the passing of the FAST Act, but the fifth is still pending. In the meantime, TIFIA funding is far more accessible than it was previously. Application fees aside, potential drawbacks include that the FHWA rules state that project costs incurred before project approval are not subject to reimbursement, and the competitive process used to choose recipients of funding.²³ Appendix 2 contains a map of recent projects funded by TIFIA, most of which are highway and corridor improvement projects; only one, the Chicago Riverwalk expansion, is a trail or path.

Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery

The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery Program (TIGER) is a discretionary grant program from the US Department of Transportation (DOT), started in 2009. Receiving a grant is a competitive process; they are offered in annual rounds, and there is a finite amount of money available in each round. Grants are categorized as either urban or rural, depending on how much of the project is in areas considered “urbanized.” This distinction is meant for areas that are suburban or transitioning; Harris County would undoubtedly be classified as rural.

The projects in each application are reviewed to ensure they are in line with the five desired outcomes: safety, economic competitiveness, state of good repair, livability and environmental sustainability. In Georgia, recent projects that have received TIGER funding include the Atlanta Streetcar, the southwest corridor of the Atlanta BeltLine and the downtown Dahlonega Complete Streets Corridor Improvement

²² Georgia does not have a SIB per se. It does have the Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (GTIB), which is a similar entity. However, the GTIB only allows roadway projects at this time.

²³ Metal, *The Lowcountry Lowline*, 2016.

project. Of the 2016 grantees, only one, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive Improvement Initiative, is in Georgia. Impressively, most projects granted funding are either trails themselves, or have trail connectivity as an integral part of their plans.

USDOT notes that of the 40 recipients in 2016, almost two thirds were repeat applicants, meaning that the same groups of communities are starting to provide the bulk of the project applications. To rectify this situation, USDOT is making a “concerted effort to provide technical assistance to applicants to improve their projects.”²⁴ Normally in a nationally competitive process a rural county might be at a disadvantage, the Department of Transportation’s desire to improve the diversity of applicants and recipients means that the rural nature of the county, combined with the relatively low cost of the trail in comparison to many others around the nation, could be leveraged in order to increase the chances of becoming a recipient.

An important point to note for both TIFIA and TIGER is that while recreational trails (including rail-trails) are eligible for funding under these programs, they are not considered competitive unless they are part of a larger project. What this means is that the trail or trail segment must be a part of a larger initiative to improve bike or pedestrian infrastructure in the county, a regional trail network, or something similarly beyond the trail itself.²⁵

Georgia Recreational Trails Program

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a grant program administered by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, but funded by the FHWA. Its purpose is to build and maintain recreational trails and related facilities that further a specific goal of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The program has recently undergone some changes; Grants are traditionally awarded on an

²⁴ *TIGER Discretionary Grants*, 2016.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

annual basis, but it was recently announced that grants would be awarded on a biennial basis beginning in 2017. The program will place more of an emphasis on projects that are ready for immediate construction, and the award amounts will be raised from the current level of \$100,000, accordingly. The changes are meant to increase the amount of award money available each cycle, and allow for speedier construction by placing priority on projects that are ready to go.²⁶

Community Development Block Grants

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is a block grant program administered by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It provides grants to local and state governments for a variety of community development and community improvement projects. Grants can be administered to local governments directly, or given to states to disperse as smaller grants to counties or small city governments.

The new federal budget released by the Trump Administration would eliminate or cripple funding for the CDBG program. While the budget has yet to be approved as of the time of this writing, the sentiment behind cutting funding in the first place will likely endure, meaning CDBG money may not be a wise pursuit.²⁷

Community Transformation Grants

The Community Transformation Grant Program (CTG) is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CTG grants are given to projects with a focus on public health, and to “to design and carry out local programs that prevent chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.” A focus on active living and lifestyles is one of the eligible criteria for projects to receive funding.

²⁶ NPS, *Recreational Trails Program*.

²⁷ Sisson, “Proposed Trump budget makes billion-dollar cuts”, 2017.

The program is funded by the Prevention and Public Health Fund, which is part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Given the new administration's explicit desire to replace the ACA, it is unclear whether CTG funding will be available in the future.²⁸

Public Works Program

The Public Works Program is a program administered by the Economic Development Administration (EDA), part of the US Department of Commerce. It is intended to aid rural and distressed communities across the US revitalize and upgrade public infrastructure to “attract new industry, encourage business expansion, diversify local economies, and generate or retain long-term, private sector jobs and investment.” Projects must meet at least one of the EDA's criteria to qualify, which can be anything from environmental cleanup to economic revitalization.²⁹

The Center for Creative Land Recycling, a 501(c)(3) dedicated to adaptive reuse and curbing urban sprawl, estimates that Public Works investment has historically ranged from \$200,000 to \$3 million, with the average being around \$1.4 million. Around one hundred projects a year on average received Public Works investments,³⁰

Active Living by Design

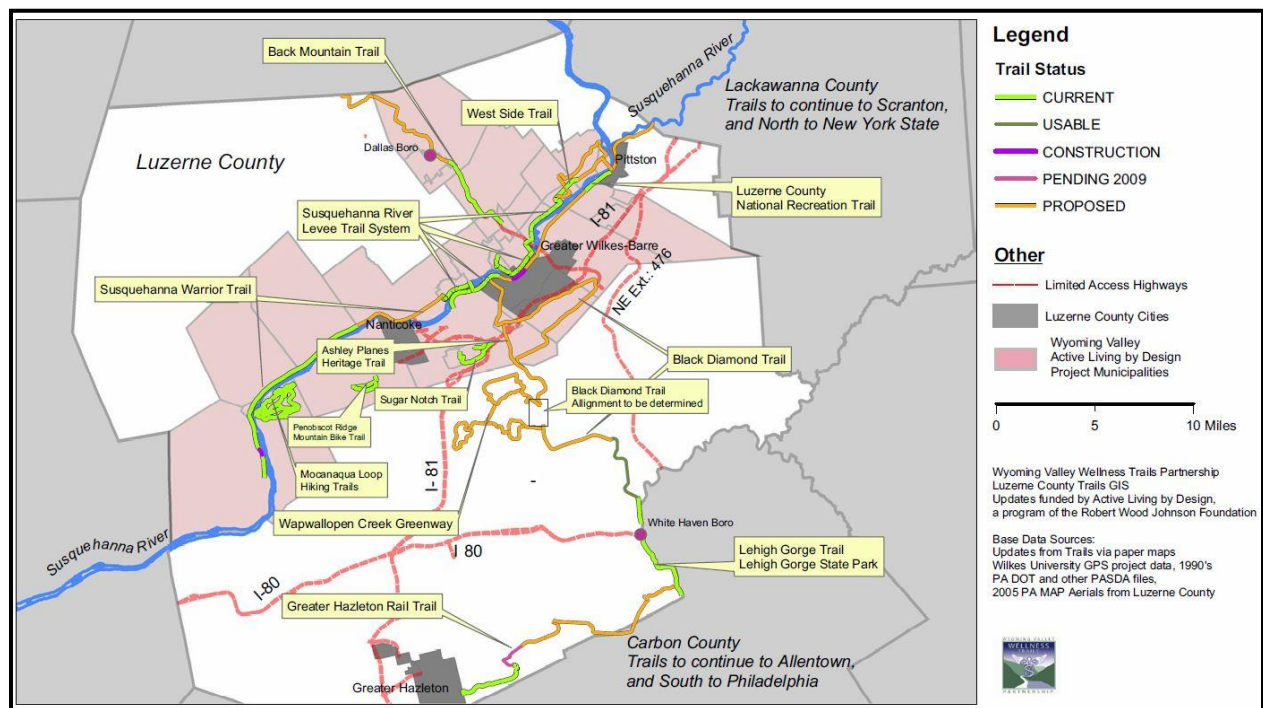
Active Living by Design is a nonprofit based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Their goal is to “create healthy communities” by partnering with local government, investors and other nonprofits. To further this goal, they provide grants to communities for a variety of projects. Michele Schasberger et al. detail the results of one of these grants in the Wyoming Valley, a region in northeastern Pennsylvania. The argument for trails is often based around recreation and active living. Schasberger et al. make the argument that trail

²⁸ CDC, *Community Transformation Grants*.

²⁹ EDA, *Public Works Program*.

³⁰ Center for Creative Land Recycling (CCLR), “EDA Opens Public Works Program”, 2016.

development, land conservation and active lifestyles are natural allies, and that supporters of these goals can be found from urban to rural communities. In the Wyoming Valley, the goal was to build a network of trails spanning the full spectrum of the built environment, connecting the rural, suburban and urban. The connected network promoted more active lifestyles, while allowing residents to preserve the lifestyle that most appealed to them.³¹



Map of rail-trails in Luzerne County, PA. Source: Schasberger et al.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation estimates that the average Active Living by Design grants have been around \$100,000.³² Though this is a drop in the bucket for most trails, it may be an option for shorter trail segments more likely to see frequent recreational activity, and thus present a stronger argument for active living. For the Harris County trail the most likely segment(s) to meet these criteria would be those near Callaway Gardens and F.D. Roosevelt State Park.

³¹ Schasberger, "Promoting and Developing a Trail Network", 344.

³² Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, "Program and Grant Archive".

In the Harris County context, this kind of development is in keeping with stated community goals, which is to, as much as possible, maintain the “small town atmosphere” and “rural character” of the county.³³

Trails provide easier access to existing greenspace that might otherwise be underutilized or unconnected, like forests and parks, while incentivizing the preservation of these spaces for their therapeutic and ecological value. They also have the added benefit of encouraging more active lifestyles in rural areas, where places to easily walk and bike not alongside automobiles might be few and far between.

PRIVATE

Transfer of Development Rights

Transfer of development rights (TDR) is a mechanism whereby development is transferred from one geographic area to another. It is usually used to save ecologically or environmentally sensitive areas (known as “sending areas” in these schemes) from development. The “receiving areas” are those which would most benefit from further development. To incentivize the transfer, the density of development allowed in the receiving areas is usually increased.

In a largely rural context like Harris County, this kind of scheme could have the benefit of focusing where development can occur, while solidifying where it cannot. This is important, because though Harris County is largely rural, its proximity to the ever-growing Columbus means it will inevitably be viewed as a prime source of land for the growing population. A 2009 Community Assessment of Harris County said as much, stating that one of the key challenges for the county was creating a “land use system that protects environmentally sensitive areas and creates/maintains a greenspace/open space preservation system.” (Lower Chattahoochee Regional Development Center).

³³ *Harris County Comprehensive Plan*, 4, 7.

Given that another pressing challenge “integrating walking and biking opportunities... and creating connectivity between future and existing developments” (Lower Chattahoochee Regional Development Center in Columbus) is another identified priority, TDR is perhaps not so farfetched.

Leasing to Utilities

Another public-private development scheme is leasing development rights to utility companies. In the past, new rail lines were often easily accessible routes for electricity, and thus many rail corridors often had power lines running alongside them. So, though it is not necessarily a traditional method of developing public space, leasing development rights of a rail-trail to a utility provider is in some sense a callback to an original function of the railroad.

The idea is that the local municipality leases the subsurface rights to the corridor in question to a utility provider, who will then install the respective pipes or cables. The utility provider then pays for the development of the trail overtop these lines. Besides paying for the trail, this kind of arrangement could also help the local community by bringing greater utility access. For rural communities like Harris County, it could also incentive the development of utilities that would otherwise not be financially feasible, like fiber optic cables. The route of the rail corridor in question could lend itself to this kind of scheme, given that it goes through both the county seat and its largest city.

LOANS

Business & Industry Loans

The Business & Industry Loan Program from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) is a rural economic development program that seeks to bolster the amount of credit available to rural businesses and public bodies. It does so by guaranteeing loans for rural businesses or public bodies, allowing lenders to provide more credit than they might otherwise. Any lender may qualify for the program, as

long as the project is in an area that is not a city or town with more than 50,000 residents. The funds may be used for the “purchase and development of land, easements, rights-of-way, buildings, or facilities,” which opens the way for a rail-trail.

Though by no means the only option, Synovus, which is headquartered in Columbus, would seem an easy first choice of lender. Their ownership of Columbus Bank & Trust gives them sufficient stake in the local community, and their size and regional status in the Southeastern US most likely gives them the capability to be able to finance this kind of project, especially if guaranteed by the USDA.³⁴

OTHER

Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

The Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) is an arm of the National Park Service (NPS) that provides technical assistance to local governments. As its name suggests, it provides assistance to communities wishing to develop or preserve open space. While not a grant, the RTCA does provide an NPS staff person “with experience in community-based outdoor recreation and conservation to work with partners,” to represent the community.³⁵

Army Corps of Engineers

Similar to a TDR program, a possible development strategy is to request the assistance of the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to do the actual construction of the trail. How this kind of arrangement is funded is highly situational, as it could come from an internal federal grant given to the USACE or self-funded by the Corps as a means of obtaining experience for members in a specific kind of construction.

³⁴ USDA Rural Development, *Business & Industry Loan Guarantees*.

³⁵ NPS, *Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program*

Though this is perhaps the murkiest option, there is precedent nationally and in the region for involving the USACE in the development of infrastructure projects. There are dozens of recreational trails created by the USACE around the country, many of which have been designated as National Recreation Trails by the US Department of the Interior.³⁶ Locally, there is also the example of the urban whitewater course in downtown Columbus; the USACE assisted in the cleanup of this section of the Chattahoochee River, as well as aiding in the construction of the artificial system of veins that control the rapids.³⁷ The proximity to Fort Benning, as well as potential troublesome spots near F.D. Roosevelt State Park make worth pursuing if more direct funding options prove unavailable.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS & THE FUTURE OF HARRIS COUNTY

Guiding Growth & Development

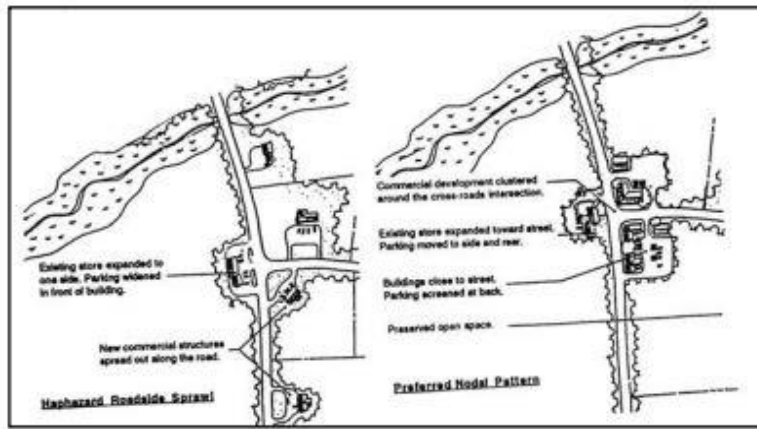
Harris County is a largely rural county pocketed with small towns, nature preserves and large tracts of undeveloped land. As part of the Columbus metro area, Harris County inevitably serves as something of a suburb for the central city. However, while a certain amount of population growth is inevitable, county government and residents are conscious of the fact that unrestricted and unguided growth may unwittingly lead to the destruction of the current rural aesthetic.

The County's most recent Comprehensive Plan, prepared by the River Valley Regional Commission, seeks to provide a roadmap for effectively managing growth by encouraging "village" style development. By "village" they mean clustering commercial and residential development in smaller geographic areas, particularly around intersections and existing commercial nodes. This includes the

³⁶ Garman, "U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' trails designated as National Recreation", 2013.

³⁷ Adams, "Chattahoochee River restoration project, 2013.

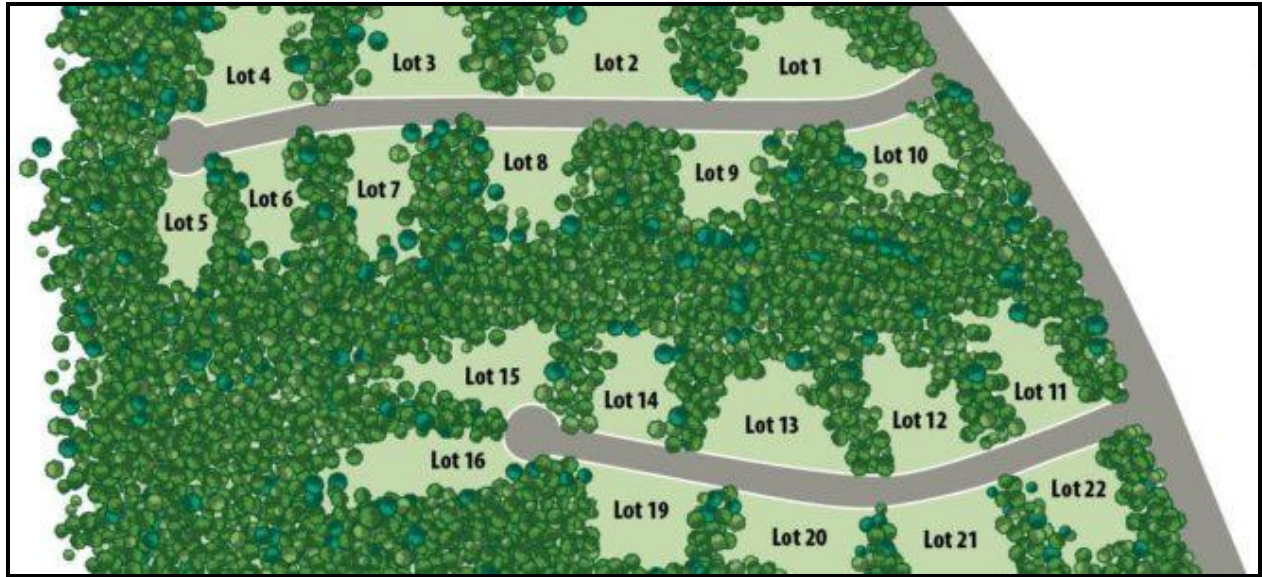
existing cities in the county, but also the “rural villages” of Cataula and Ellerslie, which are based around the intersection of various state and local highways.³⁸



Preferred “node” style development on the right, versus “strip” style on the left.

Another proposed method for guiding growth is infill housing using vacant land near existing development, rather than the development of wilderness or otherwise unspoiled land. Infill is particularly encouraged in and near existing cities like Pine Mountain, Hamilton and West Point, but also in existing subdivisions. What the plan discourages is the creation of entirely new housing developments where none previously existed. A prime example of the kind of development that would be discouraged by this type of plan is the Maple Creek subdivision in Cataula, currently being developed on what was once undeveloped forest. The plan makes is clear that the consensus among residents and county leadership is that growth should be contained as much as possible in existing population centers, or along the border with Columbus / Muscogee County, where many residents commute for work.

³⁸ *Harris County Comprehensive Plan, 2014-2018.*



Map of the Maple Creek Development. Source: Hughston Homes

A trail can help guide population growth by providing an amenity that is more likely to attract development than areas without it. There is plenty of evidence that trails encourage nearby development. Eastside Atlanta neighborhoods have seen an explosion in popularity since the advent of the BeltLine, and homes and apartments are seemingly off the market before they are even listed.

There is also evidence that rail-trails shape urbanization patterns in rural counties as well. A recent study of the Silver Comet Trail in Polk County, Georgia reveals that, while population in much of the county has been declining, growth near the trail remains healthy. The city of Rockmart has seen the expansion of its borders in such a way that very clearly follows the Silver Comet.³⁹ The same pattern would hopefully hold true in Harris County, encouraging development in Pine Mountain, Hamilton and near the Cataula depot.

³⁹ Shelton, *The Silver Comet & Polk County*, 2016.

Future Economic Development

Of course, part of the reasoning for investing in this kind of project is the hope that it will in turn encourage investment in the community. Though a trail might not provide direct benefits for businesses or industries, the effect of aesthetic improvements should not be underestimated, especially for a community with a robust tourism industry.

A community assessment of the county conducted by the Lower Chattahoochee Regional Development Center revealed that the economy of the county is heavily dependent on tourists and tourism-related activities. Residents not involved in these industries must often look elsewhere for employment, either in Columbus or other counties in the MSA; nearly 70% of residents are employed outside the county.⁴⁰ The county government is taking steps to diversify the local economy, including plans for a new business park and the establishment of the Kia plant in West Point.

Though there is evidence that a rail-trail by itself does attract jobs and businesses to a rural area, but the current dominance of tourism and recreation presents a unique opportunity for the development of this particular trail.⁴¹ As previously established, the route passes through or near several major tourism and recreation spots within the county, Callaway Gardens being the biggest. The trail would connect the residents of Pine Mountain directly to the main entrance along US-27, and would likewise provide easier connection to F.D. Roosevelt State Park just down the road. Both the Gardens and the state park already have their own system of trails and bike paths, and further connectivity between the two can only be a boon for both. This makes the trail a strong investment in the tourist economy of the county, and any subsequent boom would likely have a greater economic impact in other industries.

⁴⁰ Lower Chattahoochee Regional Development Center, *Harris County Community Assessment*, 2009, p. 4.

⁴¹ Shelton, *The Silver Comet & Polk County*.

Though in the long-term a more comprehensive strategy for attracting and retaining a diverse array of businesses is certainly necessary, establishing a bedrock of key community infrastructure now will undoubtedly help make the county a more attractive location in the future. There are 982 businesses with addresses in Harris County. Of these, 225 (23%) are within a half mile of the proposed trail throughout the county.

Though half a mile is indeed a bit far for most people to walk, it is often used as a maximum distance your average person will consider walking for a good or service. For many of these businesses, a nearby trail or walking path does not translate to increased business. But industries that traditionally rely more on foot traffic and high visibility (like retail and food service) could indeed see an uptick in business related to patronage on a trail. It helps that many of these are already located in or near Cataula, Hamilton and Pine Mountain, which are already more easily walkable than other areas of the county.

Local Alternative Transportation Network

Previously it was mentioned that trails can be used as a method of alternative transportation, providing infrastructure that does not require users to share the same space as automobiles. The BeltLine is a prime example of this, with transit and better mobility for bicycles being key components of the plan since its inception.⁴²

Though the route of the trail through Harris County provides limited use for commuting, it does pass by or through several important locations in the county. In Hamilton, it passes within one block of the county courthouse and square, and across the street from Harris County Carver Middle School. Hamilton already has its own walking trail, and connecting the two would not be difficult. Though Harris County

⁴² Gravel, 1999.

High School is a bit further away, a short spur of less than a mile is all that is needed to make walking or biking to and from Hamilton feasible.

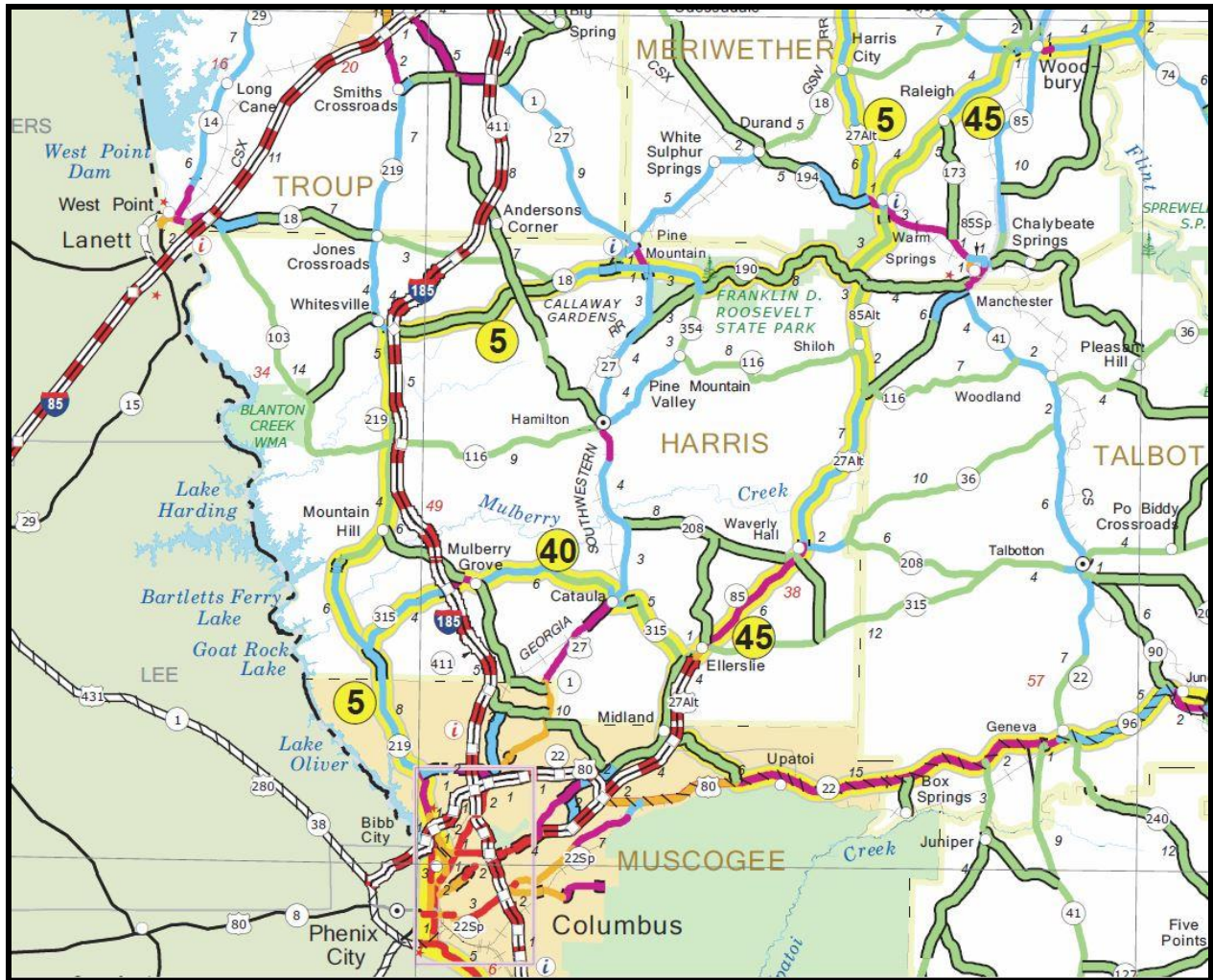
As previously mentioned, the Gardens and state park already have their own internal networks. Hamilton similarly has its own walking path, along with the cities of Waverly Hall and Shiloh.⁴³ Though connecting them all would mean using more than just rail infrastructure, developing this corridor would be a big step towards the creation of an entirely local network of multi-use paths throughout the county. The next logical step would be exploring better connection to Columbus or the Chattahoochee, either via the Fall Line Trace or the Riverwalk downtown.

Supplemental State Bike Routes

Perhaps more feasible than commuting is the argument that the trail could in the future aid in expanding and enhancing the State of Georgia's bike route infrastructure. The numbered bike route system of Georgia was created in the late 1990s, with 14 routes. The system is still much the same, though two of the routes have since been incorporated into the US numbered bike route system.

Currently, there are two Georgia state bicycle routes that run through the area, State Bicycle Routes 5 and 45. Route 5, also called the Chattahoochee Trace, runs from Lake Seminole on Georgia's border with Florida to Lookout Mountain, traveling due north along the western border of Georgia. Route 45, also called the Little White House, begins in nearby Ellerslie before heading northeast through F.D. Roosevelt State Park and Roosevelt's Little White House in Warm Springs. Along the way it splits into two separate branches that end in Atlanta and Palmetto, both in Fulton County.

⁴³ *Harris County Community Assessment*, 11.



Georgia State Bike Routes through Harris County and nearby counties.

While Columbus has routes in multiple directions, this trail could potentially help fill the gap between 5 and 45 for a northerly route from Columbus, and help better connect the growing city of LaGrange in Troup County to the state bike routes. This would of course require the extension of the trail further north into Troup or Meriwether counties and south into Columbus, which are obviously outside the jurisdiction of Harris County. The fact that travelers would be separated from car traffic through much of the journey is an added benefit, as it allows for safer long-distance travel for cyclists.

CONCLUSION

The need for developing and enhancing public goods that connect communities, enable healthier lifestyles, encourage recreation *and* transform disused infrastructure in the process is gaining ground in academic and public discourse. The range of funding sources available for rail-trails and trail development is far more extensive than it used to be, and is likely to continue growing as the dominance of highways and automobiles lessens in the nation's infrastructure funding streams.

Similarly, there is growing recognition of the needs of rural and exurban communities, and the importance of planning for their success as well. The challenges faced by small towns and unincorporated places are unique, and may not easily fit traditional notions of economic and community development based in places with larger populations, infrastructure needs and funding sources.

Rail-trails offer a unique opportunity for local governments to invest in their own backyards. The near-ubiquitous nature of railroads across the US means that the bedrock for this kind of infrastructure has already been laid, and smaller governments may be able to create more extensive networks faster and cheaper than in larger cities. The Silver Comet took nearly ten years to complete from end to end; in that same time, only a few miles of the BeltLine were completed.

Trails cannot by themselves solve the economic malaise and population loss being experienced by many rural counties across the country. They are one multi-use tool of many in the local government's belt. But they demonstrate to the outside world that this community is competitive and intelligent, and confirm to residents that their community is worth their time and effort. They are a tangible sign that though industries and people come and go, this place matters.

IMPORTANT LINKS

Active Living by Design

<http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/programs-and-initiatives/A/active-living-by-design.html>

Business & Industry Loans

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-industry-loan-guarantees>

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

<http://www.dca.state.ga.us/communities/cdbg/>

Community Transformation Grants (CTG)

<https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/communitytransformation/funds/>

Georgia Recreational Trails Program (RTC)

<http://www.gastateparks.org/grants/rtp>

Public Works Program

<https://www.eda.gov/pdf/about/Public-Works-Program-1-Page.pdf>.

Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA)

<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/index.htm>

Transportation Alternatives (TA)

http://trade.railstotrails.org/ta_basics

Transportation Infrastructure Financing and Investment Act (TIFIA)

<https://www.transportation.gov/buildamerica/programs-services/tifia/applying>

Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER)

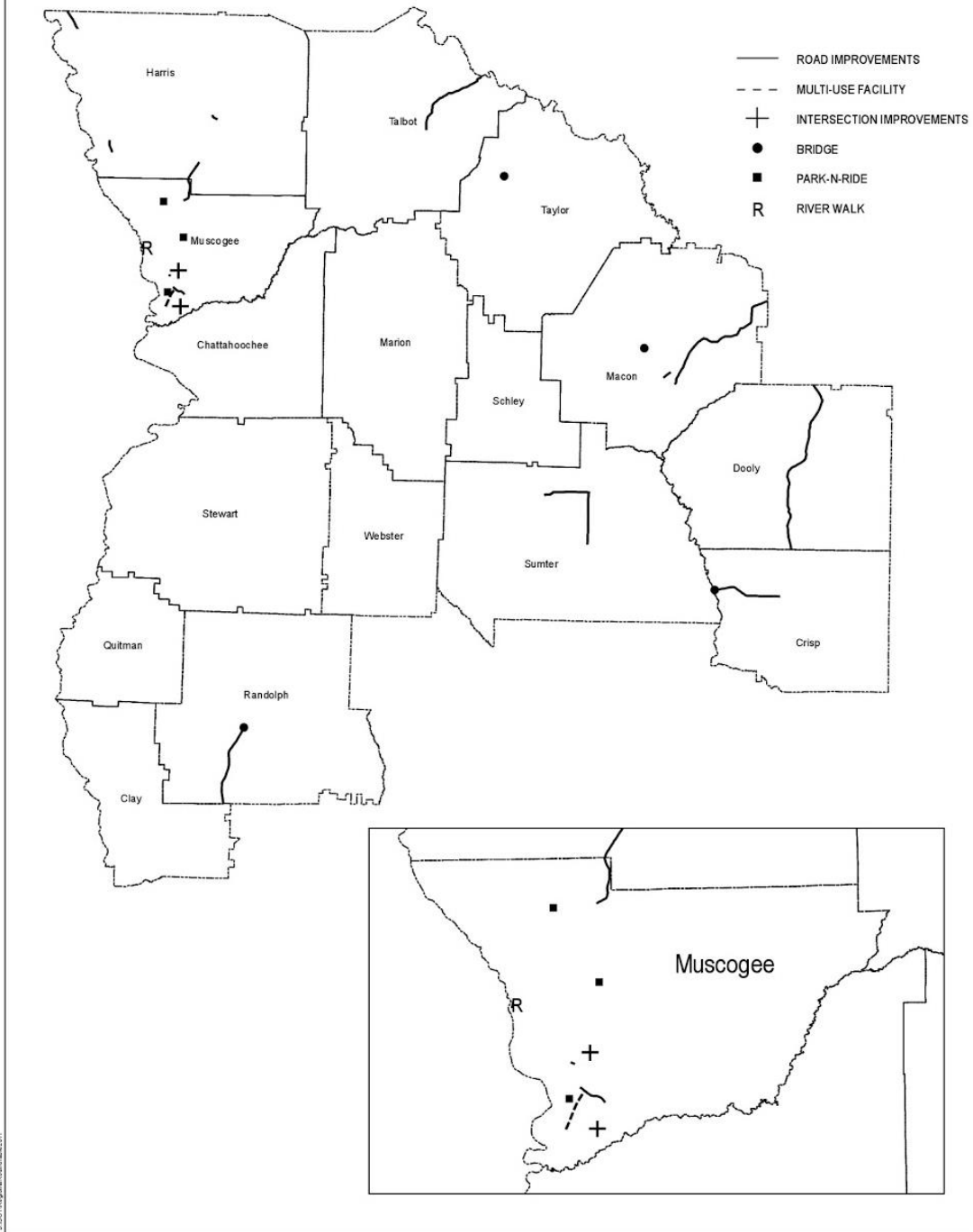
<https://www.transportation.gov/tiger>

RVRC TSPLOST

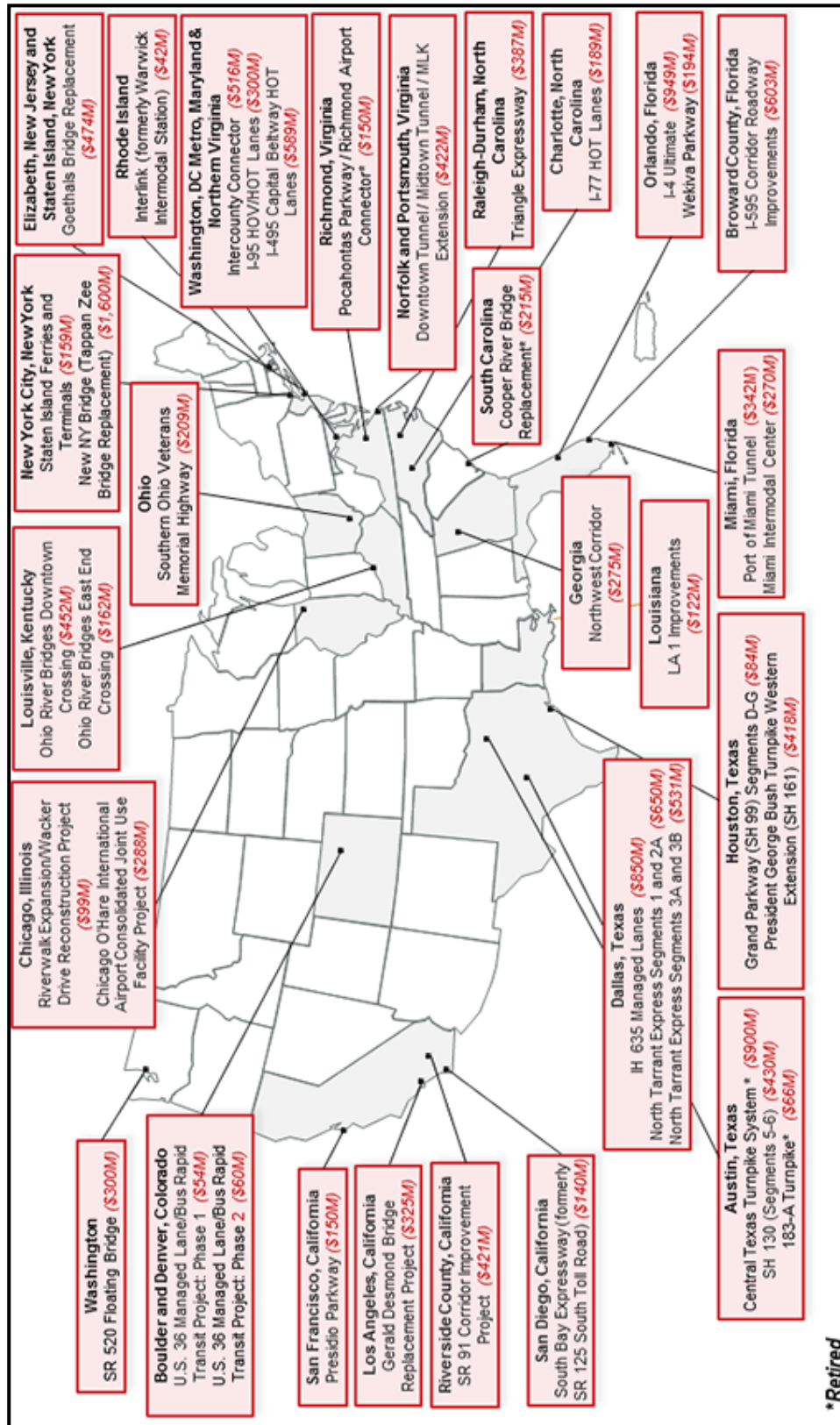
<http://www.rivervalleyrc.org/index.php/transportation-investment-act>

Appendix 1: RVRC TSPLOST Project Type and Locations

Constrained Investment List Project Locations (23) 8-1-2011



Appendix 2: Map of Recent TIFIA Funded Projects



Appendix 3: Photos of the Trail in its Current State (as of 4.15.17)



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